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Suggested for
mature readers

SCENE OF THE CRIME

WILLIAM 98
JAMES

chapter seventeen

In my dreams that night Maggie Jordan was running from the flames of her past, but the fire was always quicker, leaping ahead of her at every turn. Until she was surrounded.

I awoke sweating, thinking about her father, and about her childhood friend, Sandy.

If Maggie was the one responsible for the Earthlings fire, then why was she blackmailing Luna? If he wasn't to blame for the deaths of their father and the others, then what did he have to be afraid of? Fifteen-year-old charges of child molesting?

I'd have to check the law, but I was fairly sure the Statute of Limitations had run out on that crime.

Of course, there was always the possibility it was over drugs. It was even possible that she had STOLEN the money...

I could see either of the Pullwalter boys being mad enough about that to kill.

But then why the hell would she be calling the Lunarhouse and leaving her phone number?

I had a small flash of inspiration in the shower--a lot of good ideas seem to occur in the bathroom--and called Whitey to see if he could dig up the police report on the investigation into the Earthlings before the Fire...

YEAH, IT WAS IN OAKLAND... PROBABLY THE FIRST HALF OF '83...

Then I called Steve to see if there was any action on the tracking device he'd planted on the Pullwalters' truck but he wasn't in.

NO, THAT'S OKAY, NO MESSAGE...

It looked like today would mostly be a day of waiting. And maybe if I was lucky, figuring out what was missing from this case...

JACK HERRIMAN

But then Paul Raymonds arrived to change my plans.

A LITTLE PIECE OF GOODNIGHT

part four of four

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WHAT THE *HELL* HAPPENED TO *YOU*?

UM... INJURED IN THE LINE OF DUTY, I GUESS...

WOULDN'T HAVE ANYTHING WHATSOEVER TO DO WITH A *FIRE* AT THE LUNAR-HOUSE COMPOUND IN *SANTA ROSA*, WOULD IT?

I THINK I'LL JUST TAKE THE *FIFTH* ON THAT ONE, IF IT'S OKAY WITH YOU.

HEY, I'M NOT GONNA TURN YOU IN. I THOUGHT WE'D ESTABLISHED THAT ALREADY.

YEAH, WELL... I JUST DON'T WANNA GET ANYONE ELSE IN TROUBLE... I GUESS LUNA DIDN'T GET DRAGGED IN BY THE SANTA ROSA COPS FOR GROWING AN ACRE OF *POT*, DID HE?

NO, BUT THEY DID PICKUP ONE JUSTIN PULLWALTER. APPARENTLY, HE'D HAD HALF HIS HEAD SMASHED IN. WE HAD A WARRANT FOR HIM ON SOME NARCOTICS CHARGES, SO HE WAS TRANSFERRED DOWN THIS MORNING.

HE'S IN THE COUNTY JAIL INFIRMARY. THIS GUY CONNECTED TO THE CASE?

HARD TO SAY, REALLY. BUT HE MAY AT LEAST KNOW SOMETHING THAT WE DON'T... HE *WAS* AT LUNARHOUSE WHEN MAGGIE WAS STAYING THERE, AND HE'S TIGHT WITH LUNA...

HOW'S THE *OFFICIAL* INVESTIGATION GOING?

NOWHERE... THE *SFPD* HAVE BEEN CO-OPERATING WITH BLYTHE AND HIS GUYS IN SANTA CRUZ, BUT UNTIL WE TURN UP LUNA OR ANY-ONE ELSE WHO KNOWS SOMETHING...

...IT'S AT A STANDSTILL.

IT WOULDN'T BE TOO HARD TO TURN UP *ALEX*, WOULD IT?

SHE'S *NOT* INVOLVED, AND THAT'S HOW IT STAYS.

NOW DO YOU WANNA GO TALK TO THIS *PULLWALTER* CHARACTER BEFORE SANTA CRUZ GETS THEIR HANDS ON HIM, OR WHAT?

UH... SURE. BUT LET'S TAKE THE BACK STAIRS, OKAY? I DON'T WANNA SEE KNUT AND MOLLY YET...

Raymonds told the guard at the infirmary not to pay any attention to us or Pullwater for a few minutes, which scared me a little, but didn't seem to faze the guard at all.

WAKE UP, ASSHEAD. YOU GOT VISITORS.

THAT'S *HIM*, MAN! THAT'S THE GUY WHO ATTACKED ME! I WANNA MAKE A COMPLAINT!

I DON'T THINK YOU GET IT...

WE'RE NOT HERE TO *HELP* YOU, YOU STUPID LITTLE *FUCKWAD*.

HUKKK! UKKK!

WE'RE HERE FOR *ANSWERS*...

AND YOU WILL GIVE THEM TO US OR I WILL PUT YOU IN THE FUCKING *I.C.U.* DO YOU HEAR ME?

...YESSS... YESSS... STTPP... HKKK...

GOOD.

NO COMPLAINTS FROM *YOU*, HUH, JACK? I'M SURPRISED.

WELL, I MEAN, THIS GUY DID TRY TO KILL ME... AND I DON'T WANNA GET IN THE WAY OF *DEPART-MENTAL PROCEDURE* AND ALL...

HE'S ALL YOURS NOW... ASK HIM WHATEVER YOU NEED TO KNOW...

YOU REMEMBER THIS GIRL, MAGGIE? SHE STAYED AT THE LUNARHOUSE IN THE CITY.

YOU'RE CHOKIN' ME OVER *THAT* CHICK?

I'LL TAKE THAT AS A "YES"...

WHAT WENT ON WITH HER THERE?

NOTHIN'... SHE JUST HUNG OUT A LITTLE... MAINLY WITH LUNA.

ONE OF THE GUYS MADE A PLAY FOR HER AND LUNA BLEW HIS FUCKIN' LID. EVERY-ONE STAYED AWAY FROM HER AFTER THAT...

WHY WOULD HE GET UPSET? I THOUGHT HE WAS INTO THE WHOLE *FREEDOM* DEAL?

FUCK IF I KNOW... Y'NEVER KNOW WITH SOME GIRLS...

WHY WOULD LUNA GIVE HER MONEY, LIKE *TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS?*

JASE THOUGHT SHE HAD SOMETHING ON HIM, MAYBE. BUT LUNA SAID TO JUST DROP IT. JASE WAS PRETTY PISSED.

HOW PISSED?

AW, NO WAY... NOT LIKE *THAT!* HE WAS PISSED AT *LUNA*, MAN...

WELL, WHERE WERE JASON AND LUNA, AND *YOU*... ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT AFTER THREE *A.M.*, AND WHY DID YOU ALL VANISH THE NEXT MORNING?

HEY, MAN... THAT GIRL WAS NOTHING TO DO WITH US--

ANSWER THE *FUCKING* QUESTION!

ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT!

I DON'T KNOW *WHERE* THEY WERE. LUNA GOT A COUPLE A' CALLS LATE THAT NIGHT, AND HIM AND JASE TOOK OFF FOR A WHILE. WHEN THEY GOT BACK HE SAID WE HAD TO PACK EVERYTHING UP AND GET OUT FOR AWHILE...

HE DIDN'T SAY WHY?

NO. AND THE WAY HE LOOKED, I WASN'T *ASKIN'*, MAN... ALL *PALE* AND WEAK...

SO, IT LOOKS LIKE LUNA'S OUR MAN... OR MAYBE JASON PULL-WALTER...

LOOKS LIKE... BUT WE *STILL* DON'T KNOW WHY HE GAVE MAGGIE THAT MONEY...

COUNTY JAIL

WHO *CARES*? IT COULD'VE BEEN ANY-THING.

I JUST HATE LOOSE ENDS, THAT'S ALL...

WELL, GET USED TO 'EM. YOU *NEVER* END UP WITH THE WHOLE STORY, JACK... IF YOU'RE LUCKY, YOU GET ENOUGH OF IT TO FIGURE OUT WHO DID WHAT. YOU DON'T ALWAYS GET "WHY."

YEAH, I GUESS NOT...

HEY, KID. IT WAS NICE WORKIN' WITH YOU... I MEAN IT.

I GOTTA ADMIT, IT *WAS*. IT'S NICE TO WATCH SOMEONE JUST SPILL IT LIKE THAT...

JUST TAKES A *LIGHT* TOUCH...

I'LL TRY AND REMEMBER THAT.

When I got home knut and Molly made far too big a deal out of my broken nose, which only proved to me how right I'd been to avoid them in the first place.

And once I was finally able to escape them, I still couldn't get hold of Steve, so there was nothing to do but wait.

My thoughts drifted back to Gwen, and falling into the old habit of writing letters in my head, I began to serenade her in my imagination.

SCENE of CRIME

The police report from Whitey arrived around 6:40, but I was still lost in my daydream and didn't get around to it for a while.

I had just started to look through the file when I got a phone call...

It was Paul Raymonds again, but this time he had bad news.. Alexandra Jordan had tried to kill herself.

chapter eighteen

I was trying to decide if I should visit Alex in the hospital the next day when Steve called and made my decision for me.

He had spent most of the previous day on a job, and later that night when he had checked his tracking device, he found out the Pullwalters' truck had come into the city.

After a brief search he had found the truck in the driveway of an old house in the Outer Mission.

He'd slept in his car up the block a few hundred yards, and for the past few hours he had been following Jason Pullwalter around town.

SO FAR HE'S STOPPED BY A COUPLE A' BIKE SHOPS AND TALKED TO SOME GUYS, AND HE BOUGHT A DUFFEL BAG AT MERVYN'S. ONE OF THE GUYS LOOKED LIKE HE WAS PRETTY FUCKING ANGRY AT HIM...

PROBABLY ONE OF THE PEOPLE HE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET LAST NIGHT.

THAT'S WHAT I FIGURED...

ANY SIGN OF LUNA?

NAH... NOT YET...

He was calling to tell me that he was just five minutes away, at a strip joint on Broadway, where he'd followed Jason, so he figured I had enough time to get over there before he left.

About twenty minutes later Jason stumbled out the side door in the midst of goodbye kisses...

From the looks of it, they were more than client and professional ...and this didn't seem like any normal everyday goodbye.

My guess was that Pullwalter and Luna were getting prepared to split town, after they settled up with whatever business partners they had.

We followed a few car lengths behind as he headed down towards the Financial District, leapfrogging positions with knut every block or two.

The rain made me feel a little safer about following him in such tight quarters -- no one pays attention to other drivers in the rain.

When we got into the really crowded downtown traffic, we passed him and left knut on his tail, keeping in touch with cell phones so we didn't get too far ahead.

We picked him up again after he crossed Market Street. Then he continued down through the Mission to its outer boroughs.

RIGHT BACK WHERE HE *STARTED*... OKAY, WHATTA' WE DO NOW?

I GUESS WE SHOULD FIND OUT IF LUNA'S IN THERE, AND THEN CALL THE COPS...

WHERE THE HELL IS *KNUT*?

DON'T SWEAT IT. YOU GAVE HIM THE CROSS STREETS, HE'LL BE HERE IN A MINUTE...

HE PROBABLY STOPPED FOR A BURRITO...

YOU HEAR ANYTHING?

NADA...

AAHHH!

YOU!

GET DOWN!

KBLAMM! KBLAMM!

SCREEEEE!

KNUT!

KBLAM!

SCRASSSHH!

SQUEEEEEE!

KNUT!

I'M FINE.

DON'T SWEAT OVER IT, KIDDO, HE'S HISTORY...

FUCK... GODDAMMIT...

HE'S DEAD.

I KNOW... HE WAS GONNA HIT KNUT... I JUST...

IT'S OKAY. YOU DID THE RIGHT THING.

SHOULD WE GO SEE WHAT SPOOKED PULLWALTER SO MUCH BEFORE THE COPS ARRIVE?

YEAH, I GUESS SO...

We found him in the kitchen...

And also what appeared to be Maggie's missing gun.

I'D SAY IT'S PRETTY RECENT, HE'S STILL A LITTLE WARM...

BUT NOT *FIVE MINUTES*, RIGHT?

PROBABLY NOT FIVE MINUTES, BUT...

GREAT. JUST FUCKING GREAT. WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

THIS LUNA?

YEAH... AND *THAT'S* THE GUN THAT KILLED MAGGIE RIGHT OVER THERE,.. AT LEAST I THINK...

LOTTA GUNS IN THIS HOUSE. THERE'S A LOADED SHOTGUN BEHIND THE FRONT DOOR, TOO.

WHAT'S HE DOIN' CARRYIN' A LITTLE PISTOL AROUND WHEN HE'S GOT *THAT*? DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE...

chapter nineteen

We sat at the crime scene for hours, watching the bodies get carried off, and answering a lot of questions.

CRIME SCENE

Steve and I had to tell our story about ten times, and I'm sure the cops would still have taken us in if it wasn't for Knut.

I felt a claustrophobic grip on my nervous system. Things tied too easily into a knot with the deaths of Luna and Jason Pullwalter. And I knew that the wrong conclusion was going to be reached in this case.

A murderer was going to get away CLEAN... and I still didn't know who or why.

WHAT'S TROUBLING YOU NOW?

AH, SOMETHING JUST DOESN'T ADD UP...

I MEAN, LUNA'S HIDING OUT, OBVIOUSLY SCARED FOR HIS LIFE... HE'S GOT A SHOTGUN BY THE DOOR...

SO WHY DOES HE *LEAVE IT THERE* WHEN HE LETS SOMEONE IN?

WELL, IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMEBODY HE TRUSTED.

IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN WHY IS HE STILL WALKING AROUND WITH THE *OTHER* GUN... WHICH HE PUTS DOWN TO MAKE A SANDWICH?

DON'T THE POLICE THINK IT WAS JASON PULLWALTER? KNUT SAID HE HAD MITCHELL LUNA'S BLOOD ON HIM, AND HIS PRINTS WERE ON THE KNIFE...

YEAH, BUT WHY WOULD PULLWALTER KILL HIM? AND IF HE WAS GOING TO, WHY NOT JUST SHOOT HIM? HE HAD NO PROBLEM TAKIN' A FEW SHOTS AT US...

NO. SOMEBODY STABBED LUNA IN THE THROAT AND CHEST WHILE HE WAS STANDING RIGHT *NEXT* TO A LOADED GUN... IT DOESN'T FIT.

UNLESS THE GUN WASN'T THERE UNTIL *AFTER* HE WAS DEAD.

RIGHT!

BUT THEN WHOEVER LEFT THAT GUN KILLED MAGGIE *AND* LUNA... AND HAD TO BE SOMEONE HE TRUSTED ENOUGH TO LET INTO HIS HIDEOUT... SOMEONE WHO COULD GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO HIM TO--

And suddenly I realized the answer had been in front of me the whole time, I just hadn't been paying enough attention...

I looked through the old Earthlings police report Whitey had sent over yesterday and made one quick phone call to confirm my suspicions.

And then I was out the door, head full of steam, everything finally making sense... in all this senselessness.

chapter twenty

WHAT, NO CHAMPAGNE? I WOULD'VE THOUGHT YOU'D ALL BE CELEBRATING.

WHAT IS IT NOW, MR. HERRIMAN?

YEAH, WHAT THE HELL'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

DON'T BOTHER PLAYING DUMB, PAUL... I'M SICK OF IT ALL...

YOU KNOW, I ALMOST GAVE UP ON THIS WHOLE THING. BUT SOMETHING ABOUT THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LUNA AND VIRGIL PETERSON JUST DIDN'T FIT. KEPT NAGGING AT ME...

THEN I REMEMBERED SOMETHING MAGGIE HAD SAID THAT NIGHT. SHE SAID SHE WAS LOOKING FOR A "PIECE OF HER FATHER."

I MEAN, IT WAS SO OBVIOUS -- THE SIMPLEST ANSWER IS USUALLY THE TRUTH, RIGHT, PAUL?

WHAT'S YOUR POINT, JACK?

LUNA WASN'T VIRGIL PETERSON, HE WAS THEIR FATHER... GEOFF JORDAN.

BUT GEOFF DIED IN THE FIRE, HE --

NO. A LOT OF PEOPLE DIED IN THAT FIRE, BUT NOT YOUR HUSBAND. I'VE BEEN THROUGH ALL THE FILES ON THE EARTHLINGS. I KNOW GEOFF WAS IN THE GROUP OF MEN BEING INVESTIGATED BY THE POLICE.

THAT HE WAS RAPING HIS OWN DAUGHTERS.

SO YOU IDENTIFIED SOMEONE ELSE'S CORPSE SO HE COULD ESCAPE PROSECUTION?

YOU LET HIM GET AWAY WITH IT? YOU COVERED FOR HIM?

I... WELL... HE WAS MY HUSBAND...

IT WAS VIRGIL'S FAULT. HE HAD TOO MUCH CONTROL OVER GEOFF AND THE OTHERS... THEY WORSHIPPED HIM.

GEOFF JUST WANTED ANOTHER CHANCE. SO I HELPED HIM GET IT... I WAS TRYING TO GIVE US ALL A SECOND CHANCE.

WELL, IT DIDN'T *WORK*, DID IT? GROWING UP IN THAT FUCKING CULT HAD SCREWED YOUR KIDS UP *ROYALLY*... MAGGIE WAS AN ACCIDENT WAITING TO HAPPEN, AND ALEX...

DIDN'T YOU GO AFTER MOM WITH A BUTCHER KNIFE?

SO WHAT WAS THE DEAL? WAS MAGGIE SUPPOSED TO KILL YOUR DAD?

IT WAS A POSSIBILITY... WE WEREN'T EVEN SURE IT WAS *HIM* AT FIRST.

SHE DIDN'T MEAN ANYTHING... JUST LOST HER TEMPER...

I SAW AN ARTICLE ABOUT LUNARHOUSE IN THE WEEKLY, AND HIS PICTURE LOOKED FAMILIAR.

SO WE DECIDED THAT SHE'D JOIN FOR A FEW DAYS, TO GET CLOSE TO HIM AND FIND OUT.

AND THEN SHE WAS SUPPOSED TO CALL ME SO WE COULD FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO, BUT SHE DIDN'T...

AND WHY DIDN'T SHE? DID SHE TELL YOU *THAT* WEDNESDAY NIGHT IN HER *MOTEL ROOM*?

OKAY, JACK. THAT'S *ENOUGH*.

I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WHERE SHE *WAS*!

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT, BUT THEN I *REMEMBERED* THAT YOU'VE GOT *CALLER ID*. AND I CALLED YOU FROM THE *MOTEL*.

THE CLERK GOT A CALL AROUND 1:00 A.M. THAT NIGHT. A WOMAN ASKING FOR DIRECTIONS. THAT WAS *YOU*. YOU DROVE RIGHT DOWN TO SEE YOUR SISTER TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON.

AND THEN WHAT? YOU LOSE YOUR *TEMPER* AGAIN?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS...

I JUST WANTED TO *TALK*...

...TO SEE WHAT HAPPENED...

"I SAW YOU DROP HER OFF, AND YOUR DISGUSTING FLIRTING WITH EACH OTHER... THAT WAS SO LIKE HER.

"AND THEN WHEN SHE ANSWERED THE DOOR, SHE WAS ON THE PHONE WITH HIM... FATHER.

"HE HAD GIVEN HER SOME MONEY, CHILD SUPPORT HE CALLED IT, AND SHE WANTED TO RETURN IT. SAID SHE DIDN'T WANT REVENGE ANYMORE...

"AFTER EVERYTHING THAT BASTARD HAD DONE, SHE JUST WANTED TO DROP IT.

"AND THEN SHE ADMITTED IT... THAT SHE'D SLEPT WITH HIM. BY CHOICE. THEN I KNEW SHE HAD COMPLETELY BETRAYED ME.

"THE GUN WAS JUST SITTING ON THE BED...

"THEN I CALLED HIM, AND I TOLD HIM WHAT HAD HAPPENED. AND WHAT HE HAD DONE TO BOTH OF US... WITH HIS LATE-NIGHT VISITS... CRAWLING INTO MY BED, OFFERING ME TO HIS FRIENDS..."

SHE DIDN'T *BETRAY* YOU... SHE JUST GOT *USED* AGAIN...

JUST WANTED SOMETHING SHE WAS NEVER GONNA GET...

I *KNOW*... BUT... I JUST...

I'M *SORRY*... I'M *SO* SORRY...

IT'S OKAY, HONEY... SHHH. IT'S OKAY...

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO *PROTECT* YOUR CHILDREN. THAT'S YOUR JOB.

I DON'T NEED A REPEAT PERFORMANCE OF MY MISTAKES, MR. HERRIMAN. I KNOW WHAT I'VE DONE.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU KNOWN THAT ALEX KILLED MAGGIE?

IT WAS IN HER *SUICIDE NOTE*, WHICH I BURNED.

AND HOW DID YOU FIND YOUR HUSBAND TODAY?

HE *CALLED*. WE'VE ALWAYS KEPT IN TOUCH...

HE WAS UPSET ABOUT MAGGIE, BELIEVE IT OR NOT... HE WANTED TO SEE ME.

SO YOU BROUGHT THE *GUN* WITH YOU AND LEFT IT THERE SO HE'D GET THE BLAME FOR MAGGIE'S MURDER.

HE *DESERVED* THE BLAME. HE DESERVED EVERYTHING HE GOT... HE DESTROYED MY FAMILY.

I SHOULD HAVE KILLED HIM A LONG TIME AGO.

JACK! WAITAMINUTE

WHAT?!

EVERYTHING YOU JUST HEARD STAYS IN THAT ROOM. *EVERY-THING*. THESE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH. THE CASE IS CLOSED.

REALLY? YOU REALLY THINK THEY'VE SUFFERED *ENOUGH*?! BECAUSE ALL I SEE IS A COUPLE A' WOMEN GETTING AWAY WITH *MURDER*!

LUNA WAS A *SCUMBAG*. YOU KNOW WHAT HE DID TO THOSE GIRLS.

WHAT ABOUT *MAGGIE*? DID SHE DESERVE IT, TOO?

NO, OF COURSE NOT!

JUST TELL ME HONESTLY, PAUL, HOW MUCH DID YOU KNOW?

I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT *ANY* OF IT UNTIL YOU CAME INTO THAT ROOM... I DIDN'T *WANNA* KNOW.

AND YOU'RE STILL GONNA PROTECT HER... BOTH OF THEM? SHE'S *FUCKED UP*, PAUL... YOU SAW IT...

YOU REALLY THINK IT WOULD SERVE *ANY KIND* OF JUSTICE TO PUT HER AWAY?

NO--I'LL TRY TO HELP HER, BUT I WON'T TURN HER IN... AND NEITHER WILL YOU.

He was right, I wouldn't. And we both knew why.

chapter twenty-one

Sunday nights at Lipo were pretty deserted-- only the serious drinkers surrounding the bar, speaking in a low, halting voice that I couldn't understand.

DRAINING THE BAR *TWICE* IN ONE WEEK, HUH? SOUNDS LIKE THE BEGINNING OF A BAD HABIT...

JUST MAKING SURE THE WHISKEY STILL WORKS, THAT'S ALL...

CAN I TELL YOU SOME-THING?

SURE, LET'S JUST GO SOMEWHERE A LITTLE MORE PRIVATE...

Y'KNOW, EVER SINCE I WAS FOURTEEN, WHEN I FIRST STARTED DRINKING AND DOING DRUGS... RUNNING AROUND-- GETTING INTO *TROUBLE*... HE'S ALWAYS BEEN THERE FOR ME, LOOKING AFTER ME...

GOT ME OUT OF JAIL, GOT CHARGES DROPPED, KEPT MY RECORD TOTALLY CLEAN.

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

RAYMONDS. AND YOU KNOW WHAT? I ALWAYS RESENTED THE FUCK OUT OF HIM FOR IT.

YOU ASKED ME THE OTHER NIGHT WHAT I HAD *DONE*... AND I COULDN'T TELL YOU BECAUSE I HAD MADE A PROMISE TO RAYMONDS ONCE.

BUT Y'KNOW WHAT? *FUCK IT.* FUCK SECRETS.

THEY JUST FESTER INSIDE YOU...

"REMEMBER THAT CHOLO I USED TO SCORE FROM MANNY? WELL, ABOUT TWO WEEKS BEFORE I LEFT YOU I WAS HANGING OUT AT HIS PLACE, WAITING FOR A DELIVERY. THERE WAS A BUNCH OF PEOPLE THERE... MOST OF THEM SPEAKING SPANISH...

"BUT I'D BEEN AROUND THE MISSION ENOUGH IN MY LIFE THAT I CAN PICK UP BITS AND PIECES OF THEIR CONVERSATION. AND SOMETHING I HEAR JUMPS OUT AT ME...

"THIS GUY, ROACH, AN OLDER JUNKIE GANG-BANGER, LIKE MAYBE FORTY OR SO, IS BEING TEASED BY ANOTHER GUY. AND FROM WHAT I CAN MAKE OUT, IT HAS SOME-THING TO DO WITH KILLING THE *WRONG* COP..."

SO I ASK MANNY ABOUT IT A FEW DAYS LATER. AND HE TELLS ME THE STORY. YEARS AGO, ROACH HAD BEEN GIVEN A HIT, SOME COP THAT HAD PISSED OFF A LOT OF THE GANGS.

HE TRIED TO BLOW UP HIS CAR, BUT THERE WAS SOME PROBLEM. SO THE BOMB SAT THERE FOR DAYS. AND WHEN IT FINALLY WENT OFF...

...IT BLEW UP THE WRONG GUY.

OH MY GOD.

AND IT'S FUNNY, BECAUSE MANNY DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING BUT MY FIRST NAME. SO HE JUST TELLS ME ALL OF THIS. TELLS ME WHO KILLED MY DAD.

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COCKTAILS

VIDEO

"SO I STARTED FOLLOWING ROACH AROUND. HE WAS A TOTAL NOBODY NOW, SINCE HE'D SCREWED-UP HIS BIG CHANCE. HE JUST WANDERED FROM THE BARS TO THE DEALERS, AND THEN BACK TO THIS GARAGE HE WAS LIVING IN...

"I STOLE A GUN FROM ONE OF MANNY'S CREW WHEN THEY WERE ALL NODDING OUT. AND I DECIDED I WAS GOING TO MAKE ROACH CONFESS...

"AND AT THE END OF HIS ROUNDS ONE NIGHT, WHEN HE WALKS INTO HIS GARAGE, I WALK IN RIGHT BEHIND HIM.

"I GUESS I THOUGHT THE GUN WOULD CHANGE THINGS. MAKE HIM SCARED. BUT HE JUST LAUGHED AT ME. I TOLD HIM WHO I WAS, WHY I WAS THERE... AND THEN HE LAUGHED EVEN HARDER.

"IF HE KNEW HOW FUCKED-UP I REALLY WAS, MAYBE HE WOULDN'T HAVE..."

"THE NEXT THING I KNOW HE'S LYING THERE, AND I'M PULLING THE TRIGGER OVER AND OVER AGAIN, AFTER I'VE ALREADY FIRED ALL THE BULLETS...

CLICK! CLICK!

"AND THEN I SAW HIS EYES, AND EVERYTHING CHANGED INSIDE ME...

"HE WAS AFRAID--CRYING, AND APOLOGIZING FOR WHAT HE HAD DONE.

"I'D BEEN LIVING ON HATE FOR THIS GUY FOR YEARS, AND HERE HE WAS DYING IN MY ARMS... NO HARDENED KILLER, JUST ANOTHER SCARED FUCK-UP LIKE ME...

"BEGGING ME TO FORGIVE HIM WITH HIS LAST BREATHS."

JESUS CHRIST, JACK... WHAT... I MEAN...

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, SO I CALLED *RAYMONDS*. AND HE CAME AND CLEANED UP MY MESS. HE GOT RID OF THE EVIDENCE, COVERED MY ASS...

HE TOOK ME TO KNUT'S. AND AFTER EVERYTHING I'D PUT THEM THROUGH, KNUT AND MOLLY WERE STILL GLAD TO HAVE ME...

THEY HELPED ME GET THROUGH THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, GETTING CLEAN... RAYMONDS CHECKED IN ONCE IN A WHILE. HE THOUGHT GETTING ME OFF DOPE WAS PART OF SOME *DEAL* BETWEEN US.

BUT IT WAS WHAT I *WANTED*. WATCHING ROACH DIE HAD BROKEN ME... IT WOULD HAVE BEEN *TOO* EASY JUST TO SHOOT UP AND FORGET IT ALL. AND THAT NIGHT HAD SHOWN ME WHO I REALLY WAS...

I'D BEEN HEADING TOWARDS SELF-DESTRUCTION EVER SINCE MY DAD DIED. IF I KEPT ON, I'D JUST END UP DEAD. AND WHY?

BECAUSE I HAD BEEN *GYPPED* BY LIFE, I HAD DESERVED BETTER. BUT THAT'S JUST SOME LITTLE KID'S FANTASY OF JUSTICE... LIFE IS NOT FAIR, IT JUST ISN'T.

IT WAS TIME FOR ME TO GROW UP. AND I SURE AS HELL DIDN'T WANNA DO IT IN *PRISON*. SO I LET RAYMONDS COVER IT UP, AND I KEPT MY MOUTH SHUT. AND I LEARNED TO LIVE WITH IT.

THAT'S WHAT HE AND I HAVE ON EACH OTHER. OUR *SECRET* HISTORY. WHICH I'M SURE HE HATES AS MUCH AS I DO.

BUT HE DID WHAT HE THOUGHT WAS THE RIGHT THING, AND HE HELPED ME SAVE MY LIFE.

JACK, YOU COULD'VE TOLD ME ALL THIS BACK *THEN*. YOU DIDN'T NEED TO KEEP IT FROM ME.

I WAS SCARED... I LOVED YOU *SO* MUCH AND I DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO *DEAL* WITH IT. I WANTED TO CALL YOU, OR WRITE -- EXPLAIN SOMEHOW... BUT I JUST FROZE UP INSIDE, AND THEN I HEARD YOU'D LEFT TOWN.

I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO... I JUST FELT SO ALONE.

I DIDN'T MEAN TO HURT YOU, I WAS JUST LOST...

YOU DESERVED BETTER. WE *ALL* DESERVED BETTER. YOU, ME, DAD, MAGGIE... HELL, EVEN ALEX...

BUT IN THE END, YOU JUST HAVE WHATEVER YOU GOT, AND YOU HAVE TO SORT OUT THE PIECES AND MOVE ON...

YOU SAY THAT *AS IF* NONE OF THIS *BOTHERS* YOU ANYMORE, AND YET I FIND YOU ALONE AT A BAR... SOMETHING DOESN'T QUITE ADD UP HERE...

I GUESS KNOWING LIFE IS UNFAIR AND BEING HAPPY ABOUT IT AREN'T THE SAME THING... I MEAN, IT'S NOT LIKE I'M A *COMPLETELY* DIFFERENT PERSON...

AND JUST HOW DID YOU HAPPEN TO FIND ME ANYWAY? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I WAS LOOKING FOR YOU, DUMMY. DUH.

STEVE TOLD ME THAT IF YOU WEREN'T AT HOME YOU MIGHT BE HERE. HE SAID YOU'D HAD A ROUGH DAY...

WOW, YOU CALLED STEVE. I THOUGHT YOU *HATED* HIM?

OH, THAT WAS JUST AN ACT.

SO, DO YOU WANNA TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DAY?

EXIT

I had to admit, at that moment, looking at the familiar beauty of those quiet eyes, it was the best offer I'd had in a long time.

epilogue

The official report on the deaths of Maggie Jordan and Mitchell Luna aka Geoff Jordan, stated that Maggie was killed by Luna, who was then slain by his accomplice, Jason Pullwalter, who died himself shortly thereafter.

No one came forward with any additional information.

I've often wondered how Knut lives with what he does, capturing the final truth of death. The last glance of hope snuffed out. He's seen so many over the years that it must be staggering.

But I'd seen those goodbye looks myself recently, in the eyes of Maggie and her father. And in the eyes of others before, and I knew that those eyes wear you down.

so I didn't ask Knut about it because I was worried that he might not have an easy answer.

Burdens are never easy to carry, and those of us who are truly haunted can never really hide it. The past always finds a way to sneak back up on you, like an endless circle. And sometimes, hopefully not often, that circle is a circle of violence.

Maggie had wanted something simple, just a little piece of the goodnight she had never gotten as a child. What she found was a complicated mess of emotions and anger--a whole family torn apart by its past.

It wasn't a unique tragedy by any means, but it was still a tragedy.

the end

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